

The Grandfamilies Act

Lead sponsors: Senators Bob Casey (Pennsylvania), Sherrod Brown (Ohio), Tammy Baldwin (Wisconsin), Maggie Hassan (New Hampshire), Kirsten Gillibrand (New York)

More than 2.6 million children in the U.S. are being raised by grandparents and other relatives. And, while experts believe these numbers continue to climb due to the current opioid epidemic, there is a long history of grandparents and other relatives stepping in to care for children when parents are unable. Taking on the role of non-parent caregiver can come unexpectedly and with little help. Grandparents and other relatives often stretch limited incomes and some postpone retirement to be able to afford clothes for a child, childcare and food.

While some assistance is available to help these caregivers, available resources often fall short of providing the help that grandparents and other relative caregivers need. Barriers make it difficult for grandparents and other relative caregivers to access financial, housing and legal supports. In order to provide grandparents with additional resources to pay for food, housing, health care, and to continue to save for retirement while also taking on the responsibility for care of a child, the Grandfamilies Act would:

Provide grandfamilies with greater access to Social Security child's benefits. Currently, grandchildren raised by their grandparents can only receive Social Security child's benefits under very limited circumstances. The Grandfamilies Act would update the benefit rules for Social Security so that dependent children under age 18 qualify for benefits when they:

1. Have been under the legal custody of family members who receive Social Security (including grandparents and other relatives) for at least one year; or
2. Have parents who passed away or became disabled and are currently being cared for by certain family members who receive Social Security.

Undo prohibitive rules that limit cash assistance for grandfamilies. Receiving cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program can help grandparents raising grandchildren purchase basic necessities, such as food, clothing and school supplies. However, many grandparents are not eligible to take advantage of this assistance or receive reduced assistance. For example, non-parent caregivers are generally required to be employed or seeking employment in order for to receive benefits for themselves. This is prohibitive for older relative caregivers who are no longer in the workforce. The Grandfamilies Act would expand access to cash assistance through TANF for grandfamilies by:

- Prohibiting states from considering the income or assets of non-parent caregivers in determining awards; requiring non-parent caregivers to work; or imposing a time limit on benefits when providing child-only benefits.
- Prohibiting states from requiring the caregiver to work; imposing a time-limit on assistance or counting income or assets in benefit amounts when providing assistance to older relative caregivers.
- Clarifying when a state is required to pursue child support from a parent.

- Ensuring that states clearly communicate policies and compliance requirements related to eligibility and shares information about other available supports for grandfamilies.
- Improving data reporting requirements to measure grandfamilies' economic well-being.

Support service coordinators in grandfamily housing. When unexpectedly taking in a child, many older relative caregivers live in housing that cannot accommodate a family. Grandfamily housing is designed to meet the needs of these families and often have service coordinators on-site to assist grandparents and grandchildren. The Grandfamilies Act would authorize funding for service coordinators to provide unique programming that give grandfamilies guidance and support in dealing with daily life activities and challenges.

Promote temporary guardianship laws so that caregivers will have the authority to make critical decisions for a child. In order for a child to receive health care services or enroll in school, non-parent caregivers (e.g., grandparents raising grandchildren) are often required to have a legal relationship with the child. However, some relative caregivers care for a child for a short period of time and do not have the time or resources to become a legal guardian. The Grandfamilies Act provides additional funding through the Kinship Navigator Program to states that create temporary guardianship laws so that older relative caregivers can make important decisions on the child's behalf.

Ensures states are prepared to provide streamlined support to grandfamilies. To foster enhanced planning and coordination within federal and state governments, the bill would:

- Authorize funding for states to create a state support plan for grandfamilies.
- Direct the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to issue guidance to states to help them maximize use of existing programs.
- Create a National Technical Assistance Center on Grandfamilies to provide best practices to assist grandfamilies.

Headlines. Issues facing grandparents raising grandchildren are making headlines:

- The Washington Post Magazine: "[*The Rise of the Grandfamily*](#)"
- The New York Times: "[*Children of Heroin Crisis Find Refuge in Grandparents' Arms*](#)"
- The Philadelphia Inquirer: "[*When their children get hooked on opioids, more 'grands' stepping up to raise their grandchildren*](#)"
- AARP: "[*The New Caregivers: Grandparents Fill Gaps in Drug-Ravaged Families*](#)"

Support. Endorsed by Generations United, American Academy of Pediatrics, Children's Defense Fund, LeadingAge, National Council on Aging, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Social Security Works.